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A Sprig of Lilac

• John Keenan

The bell in the College tower tolled slowly, and we moved like sleepwalkers toward the Chapel, because there seemed nowhere else we should go. The pavement under foot had no solidity as we shuffled through the withered leaves. The cheerful brightness of that November afternoon was but one more unreality in a world that had quite literally become a vale of tears. We were trying not to cry, as men do in their public masks, but no one cared enough, and the tears came.

The Chapel was already filled, though there had been no announcements—only the tolling of the bell. The chaplain was reading the words of the Psalmist: “The just man shall be in everlasting remembrance; he shall not be afraid for evil tidings.”

The just man.

Although it is now weeks since that Friday afternoon, the moment of terrible knowledge remains just below the surface of the mind, rising unexpectedly at the sight of a draped flag or even at the touch of one's own children.

The just man.

In the thousands of words written since that awful moment, the timeless Biblical phrase has an eloquence unequalled. He was indeed a just man; the world has recognized it; “he shall not be afraid for evil tidings.”

For those of us in academic life, he was more than a respected national leader. He was a friend and colleague, who understood the life of the mind, who reminded us of responsibilities outside of our narrow specialties, who made of us something greater than we were. Perhaps we did not even know he had done these things, until suddenly he was no more.

For those of us at La Salle, he was the adopted son who had turned out well, a source of family pride. We had recognized him as one of us with the conferring of a degree in 1958; he was ours two years before he was America's.

The rain of honorary degrees that falls upon public figures never became mere formality for him. He took each occasion as an opportunity for intellectual leadership. On that February day in 1958 he spoke here of the need for educated and enlightened citizens: “We need voters and politicians capable of making the hard and unpopular decisions our times require,” he said. That need was often on his mind. Contributing to *Four Quarters* Symposium on the Teaching of Creative Writing in November, 1960, he wrote:

We need a creative America today—and a creative world—peopled by articulate and creative individuals. For those who cannot speak, those who cannot bring forth new ideas

and put them before their fellows for judgment and action, cannot lead and they cannot be free. They can only follow and, in the end, be enslaved in one form or another. They have no vision, no imagination to beckon them, no direction in which to move—save where the pressures of the moment may push them.

"He cared for excellence, for discipline, for style," said August Heckscher. And because he did, he seemed to enjoy academic honors convocations, seizing each occasion as a chance to communicate a vision of America to its future leaders. "Our problems are man-made," he said at American University last summer. "Therefore they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings."

That respect for the mind, that desire for excellence in all things was evident in his attitude toward art. Speaking at Amherst at a convocation honoring Robert Frost, he reminded us that "art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstones of our judgment . . . If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him."

He was, one of his critics said, a man and a myth. It was true, though not the way the writer meant it. Now that he is dead, there is some danger that we may retain only the myth.

But it was the man we loved. The man with the jabbing finger, who worried us by not wearing his coat and hat; who made a rocking chair the symbol of "vigah"; who liked to tease his wife, his friends, and sometimes himself with gentle mocking. The man who looked every inch the stereotype of the proud father when he watched a little boy salute; who was photographed walking out of church holding a rag doll by one limp arm as a smiling little girl pranced on ahead. One sometimes has the right to be sentimental about such things, perhaps even a responsibility. "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?" asks Emily in *Our Town*.

The nation and the world will go on; indeed they have already done so. But is it too much to hope that he will have taught us something about "realizing life—every, every minute" with our whole minds and spirits?



Certain Conclusions

• Claude F. Koch

"Lindy dolls!" Madeline was struggling with her boots, stiff from drying on the hot-air register. "Imagine, Lindy dolls! Do you remember *them*, Billy?"

"Before my time." Dr. Rennig pecked at the typewriter again. "Listen to this:

*I celebrate the walls that interpose
Between the knower and what he al-
most knows.*

Just a start, Madie—but the possibilities! I mean the end of things: blind corridors, garden walls, altars. Anything that brings us up short, turns the mind aside, makes it leap—"

"There." She patted the buckle of a boot in place. "Oh, it's exciting! If it only hadn't been such a snow yesterday. I tell you, Billy, *Winston's* is like a Pandora's box or something. There's no end to what's in that store; it'd support a civilization! And the crowds, even with the snow! But, Lindy dolls! It's like going back to your childhood."

"Blame it, Madie, you don't listen to me. Didn't you ever come to the end of something—and there you were? What you thought was a wall turned out to be a door. You had a sudden vista?" He sent the carriage clattering dramatically to its bell. "At forty cents a line, old girl, I can afford to keep this thing going."

"The second line limps." Madeline Rennig tilted her head. His back was in the mirror. The shoulder that usually supported the bookbag slightly lower than the other against the spindly chair back. A white ledge

of snow heaped beyond the window by his desk.

"What the hell do you expect? It's a first draft." He bounced the chair around. "Where are *you* headed?"

She pushed the last hairpin and patted the brown knot. A gray strand straggled out; she frowned and twisted it under. "Please, dear. Poets should be quieter. I'm off to *Winston's*; I've been trying to tell you. To haggle for that wall clock. It was there day before yesterday. I do hope that mob hasn't gotten to it. That great beauty over the front counter."

"We have *six* clocks."

"Well, we have six children, too. What does that prove? Now don't you fret—just fix that bad line." She kissed his forehead. "That clock was a present to Miss Winston when she opened the store fifty-five years ago. Imagine! But the people who are selling out the estate, Billy—they're awful!"

"You're too critical." He sniffed, and scraped his throat. Some previous owner, some fly-by-night, had knocked the wall in, and the kitchen and dining rooms were one too-intimate dining area, open to the drafts of too many windows. Billy's desk was by the least penetrable one. "You'll be home," he said, "before the tribe gets here?"

She stood with her back to the shed door and nodded. In the coocon-like stillness between the pecking at the keys, she could sense the mounded snow as something that muted the familiar sounds, the recent

sounds, the winter background of fifteen years of marriage and parenthood. They were almost suspended; it was as though one could expect the landscape of one's childhood, of one's own children. A fly buzzed along a windowsill, a slight prophet of change bred in the false summer of the window-less back shed.

"Don't be foolish about this clock. Where'll you get the money?"

She waved from the door. "Now, Billy, you keep that thing going. It'll cover everything. And be careful of the draft." She could not resist that. "The clock will make a big difference over the living room mantel. It'll make the mind leap, et cetera."

"Get the hell out," Rennig said.

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The snow was packed down and chill enough to freeze underfoot. But Mrs. Tait's head was at the door of the neighboring stoop anyhow. "How is the Professor, Mrs. Rennig?"

"He's celebrating," Madeline said, "and I think he's buying a clock."

"But—" Mrs. Tait made small gestures of incomprehension, and Madeline nodded and smiled and nodded, withdrawing down the walk. It was a buoyant day, the flurries celebrational as confetti, yet silent as an afternoon in a country town: the children all in school and only the rare crunch of tire chains to set the past stirring and turning its picture book in the mind. She pushed one mittened hand, straight-fingered, into the drifts, loosening the powdered snow behind the satin-white stiff outer layer. It was the stuff of memory: perhaps because this was the first winter in years when the drifts were so high in Wallingford, high enough to fix again the charmed proportions of

childhood between the body and the snow; perhaps because the trolleys were immobilized for the first full week in her adult memory, and people walked in the middle of the ploughed streets as though through a muff; perhaps because Miss Winston was dead, and Miss Winston had always prepared against the snow. Though the boots that had appeared in Winston's window, in the long winters of her childhood, bizarre and dusty and unbelievably numerous, dug up at the first flakes from some subcellar, always out of fashion and often outrageously so, would not appear again. Mr. N. had disposed of them—callously and cruelly, she was sure. As patchings for inner tubes, perhaps.

She came to the corner of Stiles and Green, and crossed into the middle of the street through snowbanks piled higher than her head. Mr. Leckie, the florist, stood bemusedly out from the traffic signal, whose fixed red light glowed cheerily. He held an elaborate bouquet of artificial daffodils.

"Nothing is working." He shook his head in comfortable wonder. "I can't get any flowers. I'm going to have to put these on the altar at St. Mark's. How's Billy?"

"They're perfectly lovely."

Mr. Leckie puffed out his cheeks: "I can't believe in them. The wake took everything I had, and I had to slip some of these in."

"Miss Winston would not mind. She enjoyed variety."

"No normal business is being carried on," Mr. Leckie said, as though it were an odd fact. "Where in heaven's name are you bound?" He stepped out from under the red light and walked at her side. "This is the safest season for youngsters in years.

An odd quality in the air, you know, as though everything were standing still. It takes me back."

"I'm going to Miss Winston's to buy the clock." Madeline took his arm. *Leckie's* had sold her sweet peas for the May crowning at St. Ives, and the box for her first corsage had the Leckie label. Even then, Mr. Leckie's gray homburg and courtly air were ancient, towering pleasantries at Stiles and Green. Though youthful, as *Winston's* counted age.

"Those—" Mr. Leckie hesitated. Madeline tightened on his arm. He was the one friend of her father's who could not use an epithet. He settled for *tone*. "Those—*people*—do not seem to have names."

It was true, Mr. N. and Mr. J. and Mrs. L. She had heard them first in *Winston's* that day two weeks ago, the third day of the amazing snow, when the liquidation sale began. She had heard, not quite believing, the alien voices calling for Mr. N. and Mr. J. and Mrs. L., who would "take care of you." Miss Bede (Miss Winston's oldest clerk, retained, no doubt of it, because only she could uncover pinafores under odd vests, and such appropriate things as the Leckies had worn themselves and insisted upon for their nieces and nephews). Miss Bede had apologized. "I am appalled. They seem to have only initials—like laundry marks. And their *voices!*" Miss Bede did not have to raise *her* voice, for the narrow aisles were politely crowded with the representatives of the Old Families of Wallingford, a sedately lamenting folk, now making a kind of pilgrimage: up and down the indecisive elevator, into the recesses of the cellar storeroom, through the breached walls of the adjoining stores that had been gathered in by an indefinite accretion to house

the insatiable affection of Miss Winston (for almost anything small enough to stock). Over and under and around the store proper, where for so many years they had simply poked and searched and permitted themselves to be politely talked into what they might never need and could hardly get elsewhere, they journeyed on that first day of formal pilgrimage, which (Madeline felt irrationally) must surely become another Wallingford ritual.

There were no families in Wallingford but Old Families, and Old Families love ceremony. Others might appear, as passing Indians in the youth of the town might have raised temporary wigwams in Market Square. They were observed but not recognized; one spoke but did not commune. On current maps, Wallingford was within city limits and had been so for seventy years; the Old Families of Wallingford could not see it quite that way. They kept their rituals and their silences.

At this distance, Madeline almost pitied Mr. N. and Mr. J. and Mrs. L.—with the Old Families as customers, how could their experience be but traumatic?

They were by the trolley depot. Icicles had ceased to accumulate along the gutter of the roof; with the cessation of trolley service the week before, the company had seen fit to turn off the heat. There would be letters about this in the *Courant*.

One took trolley service, and even its interruptions, for granted. "But to have it stop completely," Mr. Leckie said, as though continuing her own thoughts, "is most odd. Almost a relief, one might say, like a suspension of mortality."

"Yes. Only *Winston's* seems inexhaustible," Madeline said. Even dur-

ing the War, Miss Winston, as erect as her Gibson-girl pompadour, had—and took pride in having—in some recess, the rationed wool sweater or rubber pants that William, Junior needed. And how many times, in the middle of a torrential and depressing late February downpour, with the children methodically taking the house apart, and Billy grouching over freshman themes, and the sinus year beginning, if a person thought of a hook and eye and a rare thread and an antique bunch of flowers to freshen last year's dress for the coming spring—if one should desperately think of this in the middle of a thunder and lightning storm and just before a supper of leftovers near the end of the month—one knew all would be well. Because tomorrow all of those things would be at *Winston's*.

"Those people," Mr. Leckie said, "are having trouble with the liquidation. They lack—eh—reticence. The customers are not cooperative."

"I know, but they keep coming. I think it's the mystery of the thing. *Winston's* has been a—what-do-you-call-it?—*cornucopia* all their lives. They want to see what's at the heart of it." Madeline sighed. "If it only hadn't been so blowy yesterday! I do hope no one's gotten the clock. I used to bob in to check it on my way to school."

"Yes," said Mr. Leckie, "it has the singular virtue of preserving time—not quite the same as simply marking it."

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"There'll be a liquidation, all right, when this snow melts," he said. "There we are."

Behind a wall of stalled and grotesquely covered automobiles, *Win-*

ston's rose three stories above the snow; and they could just make out the incised lettering in the greenish stone over the door: The Winston Building—1906. They went Indian file through the snow corridor between the cars and paused in dismay before the plate glass windows.

"Oh, no!" Madeline pulled tighter on Mr. Leckie's arm, with a gesture from her youth. "Why, everything's gone. How could it have happened in one day—and such a day?"

The lettering over the door seemed less clear, less deeply cut; it had a shrunken, superannuated look beside the huge script in electric reds and blues on the temporary sign inside the ravaged window.

Absolutely Last Days Unbelievable Mammoth Big Sale Everything Goes

"Those are not gone; they're certainly *not* Miss Winston's stock." Mr. Leckie gestured with his aloof voice toward five boxed, life-sized bride dolls and their elaborate trousseaus.

Radically Reduced, Now \$5.99

"That—stuff—is up from Canal Street."

It was true. Miss Winston would not have considered offering life-sized bride dolls with trousseaus. Toys were toys and children were children; and toys that in her dim aisles could be mistaken for children lolling on *her* counters would have presented an overstatement too vulgar to be tolerated.

"They're horrible," Madeline said. "They seem to be alive. Oh, Mr. Leckie, I think I'm afraid of these people."

"Don't fret," Mr. Leckie said. "They'll pass."

She could not help hanging back and lowering her voice a bit. Perhaps she had never really believed that Miss Winston would not reappear, like Merlin or Arthur, and set things to rights again.

They entered, though, and Madeline for all her thirty-five years and six children pressed as closely as she could to the old florist. She had never before been touched with the sad knowledge of lost empires. Mere artificats remained, and such gross intrusions as only Mr. N. and Mrs. L. and Mr. J. would think could be successfully "liquidated" with the authentic relics of *Winston's*. She had the fantastic thought that the whirling blast that had kept her home yesterday had swept *Winston's* with the wrath of some malignant deity.

The empty showcases might have been gutted structures at a careless excavation. Miss Bede was nowhere to be seen. No Wallingforders moved ceremoniously on their pilgrimage (*through the stages of their age and youth, entering the whirlpool*). Madeline smiled sadly at Mr. N., who alone, perhaps, could conceive of a whirlpool in the vicinity of Wallingford—he had fallen into it.

But there were so few smiles for Mr. N. in this protracted, bewildering experience that he greeted her with giant joviality. "See! Practically cleaned out. My friends were in yesterday." It did not quite come off; his lip sagged slightly on the word *friends*. "I had to do it," he spoke intimately. "I let the dealers in; after all—*two weeks*, and practically nobody would buy from me, only from that old lady, that Miss B., or whatever—"

Mr. Leckie winced and attempted to step back. He steadied himself, recovering his dignity.

"You've come back to take the clock? Thirty dollars!" Mr. N. showed four exceedingly remote gold teeth; it was like standing dentist to a shark. "Mrs. L. (this did not require a change of pitch), "show the gentleman the cases! Everything goes. As you see." Here Mr. N. drew himself up with appropriate gravity. "Everything has gone—almost. Those gorgeous dolls."

"I do not desire a case," said Mr. Leckie. "My foot, sir."

"You're a florist? You gotta display artificials; it's the coming thing! See!" Mr. N. waved with mammoth good humor to the daffodils. He shrugged. "O.K. So you don't need a case. Look around. I got time. I can wait. Nothing hurries me."

Madeline sucked in her breath and mentally counted her change. There was a movement behind her.

Mr. J. materialized in the semi-dark. The overhead lights had one by one been liquidated, and only two remained. He swung out from behind a desk (chalked \$5.99) like some primordial anthropoid from the pilfered streets of Cuzco of the Incas. Madeline turned from him toward the clock on the high wall to the left of the door. Under it, a counter (chalked \$14.99) displayed the remnants of stock—a pile of battered yo-yos and a single, one-legged Lindy doll, one goggle missing, its aviator's helmet rakishly fallen across a flat face. Oh, Lindy, poor Lindy, she thought—your child, and now your leg—

But the clock!

It held its decent equilibrium and quiet voice above them all: household deity and abandoned altar, and maimed doll its lone parishioner. Madeline felt a stiffening of her backbone, as though one of Miss Win-

ston's long buried and almost forgotten bone corsets had taken hold of her (there *had* been one, the other day, brought out to the amazement and delighted recollection of all Old Wallingford, from some—now, she guessed—chalked cabinet). She almost stretched her hands out to the clock, while in her ears Mr. N. boomed his friendship: "I was offered thirty-five dollars. Just today. Less than half an hour ago—Right, Mr. J.? But I held it for you. I'm ethical. You wanted it."

"You are on my foot, sir," Mr. Leckie was saying.

Madeline gathered her strength. "Ten dollars," she said.

The cry of pain arose above the ceremonial ticking. The cry was from Mr. N.

"Impossible," Mr. J. confirmed. The footsteps of Mrs. L., running and echoing through the empty store, came nearer. "What is it, Mr. J.?"

"She said ten dollars." Mr. J.'s voice was now a whisper. "My dear madam, my dear, dear madam—"

"Ten dollars," Madeline said grimly. The face of the clock grew before her, the round, uncomplicated white face that had survived the greatness of *Winston's*, and all the hours of all the lives of generations of children and maidens and lads of Wallingford, and that must survive the yo-yos and the last Lindy doll, and even Mr. J. and Mr. N. and Mrs. L. The ticking thundered with the tides of her own blood in her ears. Then she heard the choking sound that was escaping from Mr. N. "But, you're a lady. You wouldn't do this to me. And a half hour ago, I—"

"And I don't want you to take it down from the wall until I get back," she said. "Do you hear? And I want the key this minute."

Only the ticking then. And after a moment of such sweet concord, Mr. Leckie's hand upon her arm. "They have retired. To think it over." He took her chin in his hand as he had done when she was a child. He seemed to apologize. "Miss Bede is not here. She was discharged yesterday afternoon."

"That's what I mean," Madeline said. "Except for that, nothing is left—nothing. Look what they've done! Look at it!"

Mr. Leckie patted her mittened hand over her pocketbook, and she shifted the pocketbook under her arm and put both hands in his. They waited, while the store assumed a chill that they had not noticed before.

The dusty plate glass above the closed interior shutters of the show window glared with a cold and under-water light, confined like an ice-bound pond to an era somewhere beyond the clock. Madeline drew in a breath and shivered—if it should spill over and inundate them all! The pendulum hinted distantly of faraway and unattainable things, and the faint, half-hour chime struck above them with the hollow warning of a bell buoy in a fog. Her hands tightened on Mr. Leckie's while all familiar things seemed to suffer a sea change.

Mr. N. spoke. She had not heard him approach. He had, perhaps, been watching them as one strange life observes another from behind aquarium glass. His voice had a ceremonial dignity.

"Ten dollars and ninety-nine cents," he said.

"The clock may have been tampered with," said Mr. Leckie. His voice reached Madeline through leagues of unsounded distance. He handed Mr. N. the daffodils and ex-

tricated a large gold railroad watch from the folds of clothes over his vest pocket. "It is seven minutes slow."

Mr. N. spoke through the daffodils. His face had the ritual gravity of an Indian powwow. "Ten dollars cash," he said.

"Mrs. Rennig will give you five dollars cash and take the key. Her husband will return and remove the clock from the wall. Then you will receive the remainder."

Madeline's hands shook as she rummaged among the odds and ends in her purse. She hugged the pocket-book against her body for warmth, and offered a handful of change. Mr. N. glared at it disdainfully. In the silence that settled about her like an element alien to warm-blooded life, she could no longer hear the clock. A chill upset her stomach as acutely as a raw tooth.

"You see what I mean, sir," said Mr. Leckie. "The clock has been tampered with."

"Tampered with?" Mr. N.'s face was grieved. "How could it be? The key, I never had. Old B. wouldn't tell me where she hid it. I found it today already." He threw up his hands in the air. "Crazy, I'm telling you! And that thing up there—it's nailed to the wall! You call that civilized?"

They faced each other with mutual incomprehension. Then Mr. N. spread his hands in resignation. She could feel the metal through her glove, as cold as death. Mr. N. lifted his shoulders again and stepped back.

"My daffodils, sir," said Mr. Leckie.

Madeline saw, dimly, Mr. Leckie's thin cheeks and gray moustache and gray homburg bending above her, diffused, as though perceived through a watery element. She wondered if

this were what it was like to drown and held desperately with one hand to the arm he offered her, linking the wrist of the other under it and clutching the key against whatever ambiguous force might claim it.

They were at the door, when Mrs. L.'s voice hindered them: "Dearie," she was saying, "you have a nice child, maybe. Mr. N. says to take this." She held out the Lindy doll as if it were a prize.

"Oh, dear." Madeline pressed the doll to her breast. She knew she would cry, and she would not permit them to see her. She closed her eyes and turned her face against Mr. Leckie's coat.

"I know, Madeline," he said, "but something has been saved." He patted her shoulder. "Has Billy met Mr. N.? That's a matter to consider."

iv

She bade good-by to Mr. Leckie at Stiles and Green. The light was still red, but as he tipped his hat, a trolley shunted past.

"I think the worst is over," he said. "Things are beginning to come alive again."

She waved with the key clenched in her fist. Then she walked back behind the drifts, cradling the doll. Its lone, stuffed leg dangled flatly over her arm. Coming alive, indeed! She edged cautiously away from the banked snow, hearing in some primitive corner of her mind the rushing of waters, the loosening of time.

At the stoop, Mrs. Tait greeted her. "My," she said, "that's an odd one."

Billy opened the door. "For God's sake," he said, "did you buy *that*?"

Madeline bit her lip. Behind him was the mantel, and the wall above it was bare. "Billy—" she began.

"I know," he said cheerily, guiding her in, "you've bought everything that wasn't nailed down. And here I am still stuck with 'the walls that interpose between the knower and what he almost knows.'" He kissed her hair and reached for the doll. "What? No leg?"

She drew back, shaking her head.

"Oh, Billy, you don't know—you don't know."

"I know you're not carting that blamed clock. That's good enough for me." He sneezed.

"Billy," she said, feeling firm ground underfoot at last, "sit down. I have something to tell you—about a wall. Two walls, in fact."

Enlightenment

• Andrew J. Fair, Jr.

We met at the mountains and valleys of our lives
and discussed our souls objectively
without rancor

I showed her the flaw in her being

We were lying

at the time

together in her room

Outside the sun was warm

though the leaves were brown

We lay

with the sword of ineffable sadness

between us

leaving us loveless lust

and the flaw in her being

One tear escaped my eyes

while her eyes were bright

and her body was tired

Her soul

was as beautiful

as the Medieval Christian's God

and had

the same flaw

Annihilation is the only completion

We met on our plateau

and discussed our souls objectively

without rancor

She showed me the flaw in my being

And I was completed

The New Criticism Revisited: An Affirmative View

• Monroe C. Beardsley

Here we take another look at that genre of critical theory and practice which, in future histories of criticism, will certainly loom as the dominant development in the first half of the twentieth century. Not that it has had to wait for the historian to recognize its importance, for it did not flourish very long before it was observed and hastily baptized; and its peculiar features, real or supposed, have been constantly kept on view by both its defenders and its detractors.

Undoubtedly, this movement deserved a name, but the name *New Criticism*, given to it in 1941 by John Crowe Ransom, presents us with a terminological embarrassment at the start. It is always confusing when temporal terms are chosen to name particular movements—it leads to such crises as the decision of a leading art museum a few years ago to change its name from *Modern* to *Contemporary* because *Modern* had ceased to mean “the latest” and had come to mean what Roger Fry called Postimpressionism. Similarly, New Criticism is no longer new. But it is not a past period either, like Postimpressionism, for it is still very much with us; indeed, it has so permeated the critical scene that it is now difficult to distinguish for its very pervasiveness. Perhaps we can hit on a more suitable name after we have defined its central features.

The range of application of the term *New Criticism* is by now pretty well settled, I should think. Setting aside questions about those who prepared the way for it, I would say that New Criticism first appeared in its fullness in I. A. Richards’ *Practical Criticism* (1927). Its possibilities and main emphases were demonstrated by William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* two years later. During the next two decades, the main essays that have come to exemplify New Criticism in most minds appeared. The critic whose work, in my judgment, is New Criticism at its purest and most judicious is Cleanth Brooks; his essays in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) and *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) are models of New Critical writing. Other critics whose work has been close to the center of New Criticism and who have written now classic essays are Allen Tate (e.g., “Tension in Poetry”), Robert Penn Warren (e.g., “Pure and Impure Poetry”), John Crowe Ransom (e.g., “Criticism as Pure Speculation”), Richard Blackmur, and perhaps Yvor Winters (at least, he was one of Ransom’s examples). We could go on to many other critics who have learned from these and to the countless teachers of English who have applied their methods in the classroom.

I think we can quite easily agree, then, on the names of those critics who have been the leaders of the New Critical movement. And I think we can

pretty well recognize the new tone and manner of the New Critic at work. Suppose I quote:

In this last stanza, the theme receives a final complication. The lovers in rejecting life actually win to the most intense life. This paradox has been hinted at earlier in the phoenix metaphor. Here it receives a powerful dramatization. The lovers in becoming hermits find that they have not lost the world but have gained the world in each other, now a more intense, more meaningful world.

Surely, this is Cleanth Brooks speaking about Donne's "Canonization"—and here are some of the primary concerns of New Criticism: complication of meaning, paradox, the dramatic movement of the poem. Or suppose I quote, first, two lines:

Meanwhile the Mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness;

and then quote the commentator:

From pleasure less. Either "from the lessening of pleasure"—"we are quiet in the country, but our dullness gives a sober and self-knowing happiness, more intellectual than that of the over-stimulated pleasures of the town"—or "made less by this pleasure"—"The pleasures of the country give a repose and intellectual release which make me less intellectual, make my mind less worrying and introspective." . . . The ambiguity gives two meanings to pleasure, corresponding to the Puritan ambivalence about it, and to the opposition between pleasure and happiness.

Surely, this is Empson speaking about Marvell's "Garden"—a kind of criticism quite different in its precision and subtlety of meaning-discrimination from anything heard before our time. Of course, one or two passages cannot represent all the New Critics, for each has his own personality and style; but in these passages, we hear some of the authentic accents of New Criticism.

i

To name some New Critics and to give examples of their work is still not to provide a definition of New Criticism. That is harder to do. One of the most compact descriptions can be found in that famous work which, though it cannot be called the Bible of the New Criticism, can perhaps be called its Missal—Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry*. In their "Letter to the Teacher"—for which the teacher undoubtedly was grateful at the time of the

first edition—the editors stated three principles that should, in their view, govern the teaching of poetry:

1. Emphasis should be kept on the poem as poem.
2. The treatment should be concrete and inductive.
3. A poem should always be regarded as an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation.

Let us consider these propositions, or stipulations, with some care. Undoubtedly, they are much less startling now than in 1933. They have become so trutistic that we even find it hard to see why anyone should ever have found it necessary to state them. Surely, a reader of poetry must keep his eye on the poem he is reading; surely, he should base his interpretation on a careful study of what is in it; surely, it should be enjoyed and judged as a whole. And I believe this reaction is healthy, for it acknowledges the continuity of New Criticism with old criticism. However, these innocent-looking declarations were actually substantive and significant, though less in what they affirmed than in what they implicitly denied. Together, they amounted to a kind of Declaration of Poetic Independence, the harbinger of a revolution that was to transform the state of criticism.

Consider the first proposition: "Emphasis should be kept on the poem as poem." Part of its force comes from combining two different theses into one (thus illustrating, if I have it straight, Empson's third type of ambiguity). The two senses can be extracted by reading the sentence twice, emphasizing in turn each of the two occurrences of the word *poem*. Emphasis should be kept on the *poem* as poem; emphasis should be kept on the poem as *poem*.

The first thesis, then, is that there is such an entity as the poem, something whose properties and values can be talked about; and it is not to be confounded with its casual conditions (the poet's experiences) or its effects (the emotions it arouses in the reader). The Brooks and Warren principle does not, of course, imply any views about these external relations—it simply states that whatever may be discovered about biographical and social backgrounds, reader-psychology, and the rest, there remains the poem to be understood and thoughtfully considered. This had to be said; it still has to be said from time to time, though not so often or so emphatically today as twenty-five years ago. For the early decades of our country, despite all that was going on in poetry, were still dominated by the essentially Romantic conception of a poem—that it is an impassioned utterance, a cry of the poet's heart, "the spontaneous overflow of feelings or emotions recollected in tranquillity." Romanticism had, on principle, made it difficult to distinguish the poet from the dramatic speaker of his poem, and the poet's life from the events in the poem. Sir Walter Raleigh is said to have written this little prayer the night before his execution:

Even such is Time, that takes in trust
 Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
 And pays us but with earth and dust;
 Who, in the dark and silent grave,
 When we have wandered all our ways,
 Shuts up the story of our days.
 But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
 My God shall raise me up, I trust.

This fact would then be considered by the Romantic critic to be part of the poem even if it is not alluded to. The great progress later in the nineteenth century of literary scholarship, biography, psychology, and sociology gave encouragement to this approach and helped it to become academically respectable—indeed, entrenched. So the first thing that Brooks and Warren wanted to say was not at all trivial: “We think a poem is something different from a piece of autobiography, and since this is a book about understanding *poetry* and not about understanding poets, we propose to see what poems really are like, and how they work, and why they are good when they are considered by themselves. We believe that a great deal of what goes under the heading of literary scholarship is probably irrelevant to this task—at least, we will not take it for granted that biographical facts are relevant, and the burden of proving relevance is on the biographical critic.”

The second thesis embodied in Brooks and Warren’s first principle is that the poem is to be considered as a *poem*, i.e., not as something else, such as propaganda, moral instruction, criticism of life, ersatz religion, obscenity, documentary proof of the poet’s fidelity, etc. Again, the New Critic does not say that the poem *cannot* be considered in these ways; he only insists on the existence of a peculiarly *literary* way of considering literature. The theologian can be concerned with Raleigh’s poem from a doctrinal point of view, for example, but its doctrinal value does not decide its poetic value. I believe this point is one that our century has come to see more clearly than earlier centuries, not only in literature but also in fine arts and music. It is as though Brooks and Warren were saying: “There are different points of view in terms of which objects can be judged or appraised; for example, we can regard a bridge from the engineering or from the aesthetic point of view. Now, there are many things that can be good or bad in poems, but not all of them make it *poetically* good or bad. Literature, among the arts, is peculiarly susceptible to non-literary judgments—particularly moral judgments. We do not wish to dissuade anyone from making moral judgments of poetry if he wishes; but we insist that these are judgments of a different kind from literary judgments. And since this is a book on understanding poetry rather than understanding morality, we propose to stick to our business.”

Brooks and Warren’s second principle was that the method used in understanding a poem “should be concrete and inductive.” If we think of “concrete and inductive” as negating “abstract and deductive,” then we can guess at one sort of approach to poetry that they were firmly rejecting. This is a more or less a priori approach, bringing to the poem a set of rigid categories, or genres, instead of meeting the poem on its own terms, open

and responsive to everything that may be there. If we can take "concrete and inductive" to mean, in part, objective and empirical, then there is a second approach to poetry that they are also rejecting. This is a largely emotional approach, looking for quick excitement or romantic thrill—"Beautiful, gentlemen, beautiful!" as Copeland of Harvard used to exclaim after a rich passage from Shelley or Keats. The Brooks and Warren principle, of course, does not prohibit feelings; it merely says that the proper or most valuable feelings will not be those of the enthusiast, directed to what stands out most obviously on a hasty reading, but feelings that follow understanding and involve a wide range of response to the full richness of the poem. The principle rules out the "stock responses" that I. A. Richards talked about, the easy tugging at the heart, the self-indulgence in emotion that is not really controlled by the poem but only set off by it. To say that the critic's treatment should be concrete and inductive is, then, to say that the poem must be analyzed, must be read with care down to its smallest significant details, that our understanding of the whole must be built up out of a thorough grasp of the parts.

But at the same time, the whole is not to be lost sight of. This was the point of the third principle. That a poem is some sort of a whole with a gestalt of its own, something more than an addition of parts, is an old enough idea in the history of criticism; remember that Aristotle compared the unity of tragedy with that of an animal, and Coleridge contributed important ideas to the theory of organic criticism. One of the most surprising things in Brooks and Warren was their quiet resolution to take this principle at face value and their evident confidence that college students could be taught to apply it and profit from it. "A poem," they said, "should always be treated as an organic system of relationships." Thus, analysis must be followed by synthesis.

What the third principle rejects is, perhaps, no very settled policy of criticism but rather a set of atomizing temptations that beset critics from time to time and were, perhaps, encouraged by Romanticism and its backwash. Arnold's theory of touchstones, for example, and the tendency to look for them in poems—the purely philological approach that treats the work as though it were a collection of grammatical and semantical puzzles—interest in certain features, structure, style, message, etc., to the exclusion of the rest. But I think that Brooks and Warren were claiming more than this. They were saying, in effect, "Everyone agrees that poems can have unity; we are going to show you that some of them have far more unity, that they hang together in many more interesting and subtle ways than critics generally acknowledge. Whenever we find a strand of meaning, an image, or an implication in the poem, we are going to ask whether it connects with other elements in the poem; and if so, how. So when we speak of an organic system of relationships, we really mean it. We believe we can demonstrate many hitherto unnoticed ways in which images, connotations, syntax, meter, rhyme, etc., work together to produce organic unity."

I don't think it is a bad approximation to a definition of New Criticism, then, to say that it is criticism that is thoroughly committed to three methodological rules: to respect the independence and self-existence of the poem as an object; to analyze its richness and complexities inductively; to seek for what organic unity it may possess. It is criticism that wants the poem, the

whole poem, and nothing but the poem. If it has to have its own name, it might be called Inductive Criticism (but no short name is wholly satisfactory).

A method rests upon assumptions about the entities to which it is considered applicable. The New Critics, if we take them together and risk oversimplification, think of a poem as a structure of meanings. This theory—which is itself an empirical generalization—makes the method reasonable: for, because the poem is an order of meaningful words in a natural language, it can be studied as an object independent of particular occasions of utterance; because it is a plurality, it can be analyzed and examined piece by piece; and because it is a structure and has form, it can be considered as a whole.

The protests that greeted this sort of criticism and have pursued it are of many levels of importance. Those that can be taken seriously as reasoned objections will no doubt be broached and well-supported by my fellow-symposiast. Others are more in the nature of misconceptions or misrepresentations, and it is part of my task here to clear them up if I can. I want to mention three such misunderstandings which I am sure are familiar to all of you.

The first is this. Some of the leading figures in the New Critical movement were deeply involved in other causes, religious and social; they were Anglo-Catholics or Southern agrarians or political conservatives. And these extra-literary interests have led some people to think of New Criticism as though it were essentially a sort of philosophy or a sinister social program or, perhaps, a secret society. And, perhaps, this is not to be wondered at with titles like *Reactionary Essays*, *The World's Body*, *Primitivism and Decadence*, *Rage for Order*, and *The Expense of Greatness*. But the taste for resounding titles was only one of the quirks of New Critics, and their religious and political convictions, however strong, are clearly separable from their critical principles. New Criticism may well have affinities and analogies with other intellectual movements of the twentieth century; certainly, we can match its concern with words and meanings in many other fields—philosophy, anthropology, religion. But so far as I can make out, it neither implies nor is implied by any religious or political theories. It is strictly a poetics—that is, a theory of what a poem is and of how it ought to be read. And this poetics seems logically independent of any particular ontology since it seems compatible with all of them.

In second place, the New Critical movement was thought by some people, especially in the early days, to be a conspiratorial attempt to undermine the humanities and the whole of literary scholarship—and with them, naturally, the very ramparts of the Higher Learning. New Criticism seemed vaguely technical, intellectual, and “scientific.” Though I was only an undergraduate in those days, I remember catching a little sense of the conflict. My Freshman English instructor, a very good teacher, used to try out the Richards protocol method on us (only we didn’t know what he was up to). A couple of years later, he disappeared from Yale; and it was whispered that the English Department, as it was then constituted, regarded him as unsound because of his subversive interest in Richards’ *Practical Criticism*—for preferring to spend his time on that book rather than more respectably on, say, the works of Skelton, Otway, Crabbe, or Pye. I imagine that, like other rebellions with a

good cause, this one was rather fun to be in on. One attractive feature was that it seemed to relieve the practitioner of vast and tedious historical researches; one could be rather ignorant in the eyes of the old-line scholar and still, with ingenuity, turn out good explications in the New Critical manner. At the same time, it had its own discipline and code so that the New Critic was one up on the old fogies who had not mastered it.

But there was no conspiracy, and there was no attack on literature; the New Critics came to save literature, not to wreck it. They wanted to cut it free from its encumbrances, from the masses of historical scholarship that weighed it down, from the emotionalism and impressionism that so often passed for "appreciation." The late Chaucerian, Karl Young of Yale, whose course was required of all English graduate students in those days, because of the obscurity, immensity, and rigor of its scholarship, used to tell them that he would be happy to trade one of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* for a good copy of his laundry list. No doubt an overstatement, but the implied scale of values was shared by other scholars who were less candid. The New Critics took literature very seriously—more seriously than laundry lists or almost unreadable Medieval sources or the long-dead books of necromancy, astrology, and witchcraft that delighted the kind of a "Chaucerian scholar" who seemed never so happy as when he could get away from Chaucer. Moreover, the New Critics did not take literature seriously because it was for them a substitute for religion or a source of moral truths or a rallying-cry for the proletariat but because of the inherent values they found in it.

Now, I say this, although a third and recurrent dissatisfaction with New Criticism has been that it somehow denies or destroys or at least ignores values. It is true that New Critics have generally been a little shy about pronouncing value judgments (this is not true of all, especially Winters); they avoid the Johnsonian air of judicial authority, and they would rather let the poem, as they open it up, commend itself to the student than try to elicit from him a merely verbal approval. But they have nearly always selected for their analyses poems whose goodness they take for granted and assume others take for granted; and generally, their aim is just to discover why and how these poems are so good.

It seems to me that the New Critics wanted to say something like this: "Certainly some poems are better than others. And we may be able to tell this with some confidence when we read them the first time. But very often, we cannot be sure a poem is good until we have analyzed it and seen exactly what it is. Thus, New Criticism is primarily a way of making sure we really understand the poem before we judge it. Moreover, the only reasons we could have for saying that a poem is good or poor must be derived from the poem itself; it is good because of such-and-such features or poor despite them. But only the New Critical method can reveal these features. We have not emphasized evaluations, because we believe it is better for a student to form his own judgment. Of course, the teacher can tell him in no time which are O.K. poems and which are not, but what good is this to him if he does not know why? When he understands the poem better and more fully, he will see that it is great, and what is great about it."

Of course, this itself presupposes certain standards of judgment, and

I don't think the New Critics have been coy about them. It is clear that the concept of organic unity is not only a descriptive concept but also a criterion of poetic value. That is, when Brooks, for example, shows how well-organized a poem by Wordsworth or Donne or Tennyson is, he believes that he is also helping to demonstrate how good a poem it is. Other things being equal, if it is more unified, it is better. I don't mean that the New Critics have ever tried systematically to defend this criterion, but they have used it; and after all, who would deny it? Much more controversial, however, is the second criterion that Brooks and the others are also clearly using. When he shows how subtle and complicated, how rich and full of meanings a poem is, he also believes he is helping to demonstrate how good that poem is. Other things being equal, if it is more complex, if it has more human experience compressed in it, it is better. I think the New Critics have often assumed this principle; and this one, I know, has quite often been doubted.

At this point, we arrive at what has probably been the most unsettling thing about New Criticism—and what has been its permanent contribution to poetics. The New Critics claimed that poetry in general (not just modern poetry or seventeenth-century poetry, but good poetry of any age) has a degree of complexity that most students of literature simply did not realize. This was a revolutionary discovery, but it was extraordinarily hard for some people to admit. Some teachers felt that it was an undemocratic view since it implied that rather unusual gifts might be required to read poetry really well—that not everyone can do it. Some teachers felt that it was discouraging, if not insulting, since it implied that they and many of their students had been missing a good deal of what poems contain, and new methods of teaching would be required with, perhaps, a difficult discipline of their own if poetry was to be well taught. It was much easier to believe that Empson had made the stuff up out of his own head and had read his meanings *into* poetry rather than out of it.

And some unwary remarks by New Critics gave an opening for the general accusation that it was petty, narrow, restricted, scholastic, and doomed. For example, when Brooks sought to characterize the peculiar way in which new meanings emerge in poetry from the intersection of conflicting meanings, he chose the terms *irony* and *paradox*. Though in his context the senses of these terms were quite well guarded, his attempt to stretch them to cover poetic tension in general led to much misunderstanding. What he meant by paradox was a linguistic phenomenon of a very broad sort—including all metaphor, which must contain an internal opposition of senses if a metaphorical sense is to be born (in "thy sicke taper," we know we are to take "sicke" metaphorically because it won't go literally, exactly as we know how to construe the paradox that Brooks finds in "The Canonization," as I quoted him earlier: "The lovers, in becoming hermits, find that they have not lost the world but have gained the world in each other"). So, what Brooks meant by *paradox* was quite defensible; it is a peculiar kind of complexity. And if complexity is a good feature in poems, so is paradox. By *irony*, he also meant a kind of complexity, a duality of attitude in the speaker of the poem. But both of these terms have often been misunderstood and deplored.

What about complexity in the New Critical theory, then? Suppose we

all agree on a set of great poems, selecting some that have long been in the anthologies. Then, the New Critics were making the factual prediction that these poems will turn out, on analysis, to be highly complex (as well as very highly integrated in many ways). It is all very well to say that Empson was "overingenious" and went beyond the "bounds of taste." Nevertheless, it remains true that most of the complexities turned up by New Critics are revealed by a more searching application of the very same methods by which *any* implicit, any figurative meanings are discovered. In Empson's famous analysis of Nashe's poem—the lines

Beauty is but a flower,
Which wrinkles will devour

—to find in the word *devour* any metaphorical sense at all, we must look into its relevant connotations. This is what has always been done. But then it turns out, as the New Critics have taught us, that there are many more relevant connotations than had been noticed, and these enter into the fullness of our response. "No more than an overtone of cruelty and the unnatural," says Empson about *devour* here. Of course, it is extraordinarily difficult to prove such explications, but I believe the case in general has been made, and thoroughly made.

As I have said, complexity is, also for the New Critics, a criterion of value in that the complexities of a poem contribute to its goodness or greatness as a poem. That does not imply that all complex poems are good, for complexity is not by itself a sufficient condition of poetic goodness; nor does it imply that every quite simple poem is without merit. But it does imply that any fairly good poem must have complexities and that all the greatest poems are quite complex. The New Critics have not, of course, attempted to justify this criterion of evaluation; that, after all, is a job for the aesthete rather than the critic. But without going into the question of justification here, I will conclude by saying that I believe it can be justified and that this foundation of New Criticism, at least, is firm and secure.

THE NEW CRITICISM REVISTED:

A Revisionist View

• Samuel Hynes

A recent essay by an American critic is titled "The Current Revolt Against the New Criticism." I want to say at once that I am not one of the revolutionists he is talking about. I don't want to hang Cleanth Brooks (or Monroe Beardsley) from a lamppost—I have learned too much from both of them. I am here, not to denounce, but simply to point to certain inadequa-

cies in a popular critical method, and to suggest some extensions and improvements. The New Criticism seems to me like the first road put into a new territory; it is useful, and one is grateful that the wilderness has been penetrated; but it has become clear that the road is not long enough, or wide enough, or comfortable enough; that it has potholes where the unwary can break an axle, and soft shoulders where one can get stuck. But you don't *denounce* such a road—you simply set about to improve it, and you drive carefully on it.

That's as far as I can take the road metaphor; obviously, all the people whom we call New Critics have not worked in a single direction, and the variety of ideas lumped under the one generic name is one of our first problems. The New Critics are popularly treated as though they were a school; but if they resemble anything related to a school, it is rather the playground during recess than the classroom. And Schools, in the sense of self-consciously identified groups, are almost always misrepresentations of the values and varieties of literature. Grouping writers into Schools usually gives a spurious importance to a number of persons who would be individually unimportant (how many Imagists can you name? or Pre-Raphaelites? or Spasmodics? or members of the Kailyard School?). And the School designation encourages readers and critics to look for the generic characteristics, rather than the writer's individualities. These objections are as appropriate to a school of critics as to a school of poets. To talk about "The New Critics" is to imply that there is a homogeneous group of kindred spirits, like a secret society or a trade union, working toward one end, and mutually supporting. Now this is obviously false—critics rarely support each other (look at Mr. Beardsley and myself, meticulously undermining each other in public), and only in the most general sense do those we call New Critics share a common goal. Furthermore, the trade-union analogy points to another kind of misconception—the assumption that the members of a critical union should use *their* tools, and no others, that a carpenter cannot pick up a wrench, or a pipefitter drive a nail. But surely the craft of criticism is non-unionized, and for the critic who is serious and honest about his work, all the available tools are worth trying. I can think of only one kind of modern criticism which *must* restrict its tools—that is Marxist criticism. But the Marxist critic is moved by special motives; and for the rest of us, who are simply trying to find out what a poem means, how it works, and whether it is any good, the more tools the better.

If we consider New Criticism as a set of tools, then, rather than as a union, it should be possible to describe the kinds of jobs that these tools will do, and the kinds they won't. Mr. Beardsley has defined the method in general quite adequately, and I will assume that we all know the particulars—the careful analyses of language and syntax, the attention given to ambiguities and ironies, the concern for the poem as a complex of interrelationships. We know that this kind of close examination of textural relationships works well with lyric verse, and particularly with lyrics which pose surface difficulties (hence the two most popular groups of poets for the practitioners are the Metaphysicals and the more difficult of the moderns). We know that it has been used effectively to call attention to the dense poetic texture of Shakespeare's plays, and that it has altered the way in which we read and think about them. We

know that it has also been used to analyze prose fiction, though here we begin to run into opposition: much fiction seems to have an insufficiently dense texture to make close analysis rewarding, and some recent ventures into criticism of "loose and baggy" novelists like Dickens have not been conspicuously successful.

It seems, from this description, that the new critical tools work best with literary works which depend for their effects on the most localized elements—imagery, multi-leveled words, ambiguities of syntax, local rhythmic variations—and are least useful where large structural elements such as plot and dramatic action are of primary importance, and where the surface is not dense and difficult. I would call the New Critical method "microscopic." Like a microscope, it provides an excellent way of examining the essential composition of matter, but it also has a microscope's limitations—it is not of much use in examining the larger organisms of life, and it requires, as a condition of its proper functioning, a radical isolation of the subject from the rest of existence. I have chosen this scientific metaphor because it seems to me that the New Criticism is at heart a misapplication of scientific method. The three propositions that Mr. Beardsley quoted from the first edition of *Understanding Poetry* would do with very little revision for the introduction to a textbook in Freshman biology, where they would read something like this:

1. Emphasis should be kept on the organism as organism.
2. The treatment should be concrete and inductive (that sentence doesn't have to be changed at all).
3. An organism should always be treated as an organic system of relationships, and the biological quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation.

It is not surprising to find that some of the most famous writings of the New Criticism draws heavily on scientific method and terminology. I. A. Richards was a psychologist before he was a critic, and his *Principles of Literary Criticism* shows everywhere his scientific training. And you may recall this paragraph from Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.

This scientific bias underlies the New Critics' assumption—it is, to my mind, their most fundamental assumption—that a poem can be completely isolated from its environment for examination, and that this isolation will not affect the poem's essential character. That, I take it, is what Brooks and Warren meant by their three propositions. This assumption leads to another,

which might at first glance seem to be expressly anti-scientific—the assumption that the individual work of art has an autonomous existence: “I have assumed as axiomatic,” says Mr. Eliot, “that a creation, a work of art, is autotelic” (*auto*—self, plus *telos*—end). That is, art is about itself; like an amoeba, it has *being*, but not *meaning*. Eliot later contradicted this statement (as he has contradicted most of his critical statements, at one time or another), and I don’t see how he could help contradicting it, for experience and common sense tell us that it is demonstrably false. If we ask ourselves what any poem whatsoever is about, the answer will invariably be a statement about some aspect of human experience. The “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is not about the “Ode on a Grecian Urn”—it is about time and eternity, or art and life, something like that, something which concerns us as human beings. Poetry cannot be autotelic so long as it is composed of words—the only completely autotelic poem would be the perfect nonsense poem like Christian Morgenstern’s “*Die Grosse halula*.” But it is nevertheless a *necessary* premise of a rigorous new criticism that the poem is a self-contained, self-sustaining organism; if it is not, then the isolation which the microscopic method demands will be a distorting and damaging operation, and we will be murdering to dissect. Or, if the Wordsworthian tag seems a bit strong, we might say that the microscopic method will give us *one* mode of a poem’s existence, but cannot touch others, and that, since a poem has many modes of existence, we cannot, as critics, afford to settle for one. (That sounds rather vague and general, so let’s turn to a particular case of what I mean.)

When Brooks and Warren set down as a principle that criticism of poetry should be concrete and inductive, they excluded from practice a kind of criticism of ancient lineage, and considerable utility—genre criticism, the kind that defines the family tree of a work of art and comments on family resemblances and differences. Now, in part, this rigorous exclusion was a good thing, in that it purged criticism of the sort of prescriptive judgments based on generic expectations which make most eighteenth-century criticism so irritating and wrong-headed. When we read Augustan critics quarreling over whether a playwright *can* mix tragedy and comedy, we are likely to do just what Brooks and Warren tell us to do and what the *best* critics of the age—Dryden and Johnson—sensibly, *did*—we become “concrete and inductive,” look at Shakespeare’s plays, and conclude that of course a playwright *can* do it, since the greatest English playwright *did* do it. But this kind of critical judgment is not common now even among the most benighted of our contemporaries; it lingers on only in the genteel criticism of lyric poetry which asserts that lyrics should not contain references to ugliness, and I don’t think it is a serious obstacle to right critical thinking. On the other hand, every work of literature has a genealogy, and if this is true, then a proper knowledge of that genealogy is a necessary part of our total understanding of the work. The formal innovations in modern literature have encouraged modern readers to consider the work of their own times as radically new and self-created (autotelic), but in fact the generic roots of *Finnegans Wake* and *The Waste Land* are demonstrable and important to our understanding of these works.

As a simple example of the necessity of genre criticism, we may consider

Wordsworth's "Michael." This poem is subtitled "A Pastoral Poem"; I'm not quite sure whether the most austere New Critics would allow that a subtitle is a part of the organism, but this one strikes me as an extremely *important* part of the poem. It identifies the poem as in some ways related to a genre which extends back in time through Pope and Milton to Virgil and Theocritus and Bion. Now that relationship is not explicated, or even referred to, in the poem; is it then a part of the poem's meaning? I think it is, and the conclusive piece of evidence is that Wordsworth called our attention to the relationship. By calling his poem a *pastoral*, Wordsworth is saying that one of the significant tensions that compose its meaning is the tension between the realistic account of a shepherd's life which it offers and the sentimental, idealized version of traditional pastoral. "Michael" is a pastoral poem, both because it is about shepherds and because it makes the traditional pastoral assumptions about the virtues of simple rustic life and the vices of sophisticated city life, but it is pastoral with a difference. That difference cannot be extracted from the text of the poem itself, no matter how closely you examine its ironies and ambiguities (if there in fact are any); it inheres in the poem's connection to its family tree.

If a poem has a significant relationship to its ancestors, it may also have important and necessary siblings, and these also the New Critic is likely to ignore. It is often true of poets who are the creators of their own mythologies—poets like Blake and Yeats and Wallace Stevens—that their symbols and allusions become only gradually clear as we read over a large number of their works, and that for the meaning of a symbol in one poem we may have to turn to several others. Yeats's poem "Byzantium," for example, is widely regarded as a poem of great merit; yet it cannot be properly understood until one has read "Sailing to Byzantium," his 1930 Diary, and the 5th Book of *A Vision*. Similarly, one understands the structure of some of Blake's "Songs of Innocence and Experience" *not* from the individual poem itself, but from knowing Blake's doctrine of contraries as set forth in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and from the implications of the contrariety in the title of the collection. The New Critic would be compelled, I take it, to conclude that "Byzantium" is an inferior poem to the degree that it depends for its meaning upon materials outside itself; but I think we might imitate the New Critics, and borrow a term from biology to describe a class of *non-autonomous* poems; we may call such poem *epiphytic* (an epiphyte is a plant which grows upon another, without damaging it). I can see no reason to say that epiphytic poems aren't good poems.

Two modes of a poem's existence which the methods of the New Criticism cannot deal with effectively, then, are its relation to its genre and its relation to its corpus. But there are also poems—and I think most of us would agree in calling them excellent poems—which cannot even be dealt with concretely and inductively with very good results. I am thinking of two kinds of poems—the very simple and the very expansive. As an example of the simple kind, we might follow A. E. Housman's lead, and cite the song from *Measure for Measure*, "Take, O take those lips away." Housman says of the little poem, "That is nonsense. But it is ravishing poetry." He isn't quite right—there is a paraphrasable content there—but he is almost right—there

certainly isn't much. There isn't any irony, or ambiguity, or paradox either, as far as I can see. (Though there *is* a nice ambiguity in Housman calling it "ravishing," since it is sung to Mariana, the betrayed maid). But it is to my mind a lovely song, though not a poetically complex one, and this is true of many such songs, including Campion's and many of Blake's. The New Critical assumption that complexity equals excellence does not acknowledge that in some genres simplicity may be a virtue. By the other category, the expansive poem, I mean poems like *The Prelude*, *The Deserted Village*, the narrative poems of Crabbe, *The Faerie Queene*—and perhaps one could add Hardy's *Dynasts*. Eliot rightly remarks of such expansive works that "in a poem of any length, there must be transitions between passages of greater and less intensity, to give a rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole; and the passages of less intensity will be, in relation to the level on which the total poem operates, prosaic—so that, in the sense implied by that context, it may be said that no poet can write a poem of amplitude unless he is a master of the prosaic." With such "passages of less intensity" the New Critic is ill equipped to deal adequately; we can see this in criticism of Eliot's own work, particularly of the prosy parts of *Four Quartets*. His commentators tend to concentrate on the denser and more metaphysical sections, and to skate nervously over passages like the 5th part of "East Coker," the section beginning "So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years"—a passage which is relatively direct and unambiguous in its statement. And so far as I know no New Critic has been able to face up to *The Prelude* at all, though it is surely one of the great poems of the English language. *The Prelude* also raises another kind of question—the validity of the Coleridgean concept of "organicity." It seems to me an example of a poem which is not organically unified, but progresses rather in a cumulative, "and-then-and-then" way, yet is an excellent poem.

So far I have been dealing with what seems to me to be limitations of the methods of New Criticism. I want to turn now to another class of objections—to those ways in which the New Critical methods encourage errors and oversights in the intelligent reading of poetry. The first is inherent in the assumption that words have "levels" of meaning, which enrich each other and, therefore, the poem. This is a perfectly sound assumption, but it must be acted upon with considerable caution, and with an informed awareness of the restraints which the contexts of a poem impose. One reads, for example, in *The Waste Land*, that the crowd "Flowed up the hill and down King William Street . . ." and one may pause to note that King William Street is in the City, that it is a commercial and banking street, and that the crowd is therefore composed of English businessmen going to work. Such a comment is a legitimate part of "reading the poem as poem," since all this information is implicit in the actual reference and is compatible with the general sense of the passage; it is simply a special case of the fact that all substantives are referential, and can be explained by describing the referent. But there is a danger that the too-enthusiastic New Critic will not be sufficiently discriminating in his elaboration of such references—that he will find levels of reference which are inappropriate. He might speculate, for example, about *which* King William, Eliot is talking about, and decide that it must be King William

the Fourth (he would be right, insofar as the street really was named for that King William). Now William IV was known as the "sailor king"; in the poem there is a drowned Phoenician Sailor, and a Fisher King; thus, the street name has telescoped two important symbols, and becomes terribly important. It is difficult to persuade a New Critic that this sort of ingenuity is wrong, for the critical objection to it are mainly negative ones—the explanation is unnecessary and adds nothing significant to one's understanding of the poem.

The King William example is sillier than serious New Criticism usually is, but it demonstrates a kind of error to which the inductive, autonomous bias of the method is particularly prone. The New Critical focus on the text has diminished the strength of some of the traditional restraints on critical idiocy: convention, intellectual context, the immediate literary environment of the work, the habitual ideas and beliefs of the author, and even textual matters are all likely to be left out of the critical judgment. What is left may be little more than free association, as in some of Empson's more fanciful flights in *Seven Types*.

The restraints I have mentioned are more than limitations—they are also another kind of extension of the work, the establishment of its place in various general contexts: in literary history, in social history, in philosophical and religious systems, in the artist's personal and literary development. The New Critics deliberately chose *not* to deal with these contexts, in order that attention would not be distracted from the poem as poem. But by so doing, they excluded from their critical deliberations those aspects of the verbal arts which make them important for most of us—their relation to truth, to moral values, to social effects. The New Criticism has performed a most important service in teaching us to see precisely what is in a poem, but it provides no method for evaluating a poem as a human event, for distinguishing the wise from the foolish, the profound from the superficial. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* demonstrates in many ingenious ways how intricate the verbal structure of a poem may be, but it does not distinguish that kind of intricacy from the intricacy of needlepoint, or of ships in bottles, or of three-dimensional chess.

As one set of tools, then, the New Criticism can do some useful work for us. But if we use them, we must do so with the knowledge that tools do not evaluate, and that the important part of the work is done by the craftsman's hands and mind. When the job of inductive analysis is done, the relation of the poem to the world has still to be judged, and it cannot be judged by New Critical methods. It is worth reminding ourselves that very few important writers have considered their work in the isolated way that New Criticism sees it, removed from what Forster calls "the world of telegrams and anger." Wordsworth said, "If I am not a teacher, I am nothing"; Yeats worried about whether Cathleen ni Houlihan had caused the deaths of Irish patriots, and Flaubert believed that if enough Frenchmen had read his *Sentimental Education* the Franco-Prussian war could have been avoided. And one of the most rarefied of modern poets, Wallace Stevens, wrote that the function of poetry is "to help men live their lives." The great artists and the great critics have shared the conviction that literature matters, not as an end in itself, but as a moral force. It is this conviction, I think, that makes

such critics as Dr. Johnson permanently valuable. Johnson saw literature as a powerful force of persuasion and instruction, for good or evil, and he was therefore concerned as a critic to direct its force toward good ends. This is a noble conception of literature, and of the critic too. It related both to the central activities and values of life. Johnson preserved a careful distinction between literature and life—literature was an ordering and clarifying of life's multiplicities—but he did not seal one off from the other, and he assumed that the same kinds of moral judgments could be made about both. It is this sense of the interpenetration of life and art which I find lacking in the New Criticism. As a tool, it is valuable, insofar as it makes us precisely aware of meanings, but it does not provide the means for judgments beyond formal judgments; it can identify technical excellence, but it is powerless to describe greatness.

At the beginning of his remarks, Mr. Beardsley quoted three propositions from the first edition of *Understanding Poetry*. I can think of no more appropriate way to close mine than to read the *revised* version of those propositions with which Brooks and Warren have prefaced the latest edition (1960).

1. Poems are written by human beings, and the form of a poem is an individual's attempt to deal with a specific problem, poetic and personal.
2. Poems come out of a historical moment, and since they are written in language, the form is tied to a whole cultural context.
3. Poems are read by human beings, which means that the reader, unlike a robot, must be able to recognize the dramatic implications of the form.

Fit the Teller to the Tale?

● W. Arthur Boggs

Chaucer, you and I must have this out.
 I decry the way you treat that squire,
 the Frankeleyn, in your prologue, make him glutton,
 and then you turn and let him tell the "allerbeste"
 tale of all, so richly psychological!
 No man mad for sauce and greasy goose
 could be so much a gentleman.
 So why when Homer only nodded did you sleep?
 The tale he told was fit for kings
 and not some lover of paltry things.

The Trouble with Writing Poetry

• John Fandel

The trouble with writing poetry is there are so many troubles. But I am going to describe only five, five I have had to live with: the trouble of beginning, the trouble of realizing, the trouble of disposing, the trouble of enjoying, the trouble of understanding. In refining five, I hope to be suggesting others.

The trouble of beginning is not the trouble of the blank sheet of paper. A blank sheet of paper has at least this merit: it is unspoiled. And it may be better so; often the watermark is finer than the scribble of me upon it.

It is easy to begin: I think I have something to say. It is not so easy to stop: I like the sound of my voice. Is egotism, verbalized, poetry? Is it really of importance to my neighbor that I have seen an oriole on his fence in mid-December? Is it of any importance to him to know the tempo of my pulse or the measure of my heart?

The trouble of beginning is the trouble of concluding where I have been going, and where I finally am, after I have written myself on the blank paper. If I have written him there, too, then in my ending and my beginning, I have told him about himself in me: I have told him of the Creation of the world. Then the only trouble in concluding is the whole trouble of that beginning: at its best, a necessary reminder of the first awful creative act, what terrible part in it we play, our commitment, whether in my iambs or in his quickened senses. Beginning, then, is my greatest trouble; the conclusion I should intend before I begin.

But I can not casually dismiss the practical act of beginning, the *how to start* of putting the poem on paper. What of the act of writing the first verse? The first verse written, how shall I follow it to its fulfillment? Begin in the wonder of the verse made; conclude in the dedication to making it stay made. Follow it through to its satisfied being. Spank it into breathing. It has life, this being of words, and I am its midwife and then its tutor and then its guardian, giving it steady feet so that it can stand upon them to teach me and my neighbor what it knows, its having survived the troubles of being conceived. If it has any significant life to breathe, it will kick and struggle its way out. If I have any effective way to teach it that poise is the greatest preserver and director of its forces, I will show it that way. The art of each of us, the artfulness of each of us, is in the nature of the being of us; and our beings, our natures, will speak.

The trouble of beginning as “starting” or “concluding” is at last not a trouble as an unbearable burden, when once one realized that writing poetry begins in an ordered acceptance of an ordered universe, not in a concern for “mode” or “know how” that is sure to sell, or win laurels. Then the trouble of concluding which is the trouble of beginning is solved in the beginning. In that faith, the labor of both is joy.

The trouble of realizing starts by being the trouble of making real in words my self. It is the trouble of bringing back alive, imaged, the rhythm of what I felt in mind and thought in heart, of showing it in the captivity of a form that is not a cage or a showcase or a coffin, the captivity that gives it and myself freedom. The trouble of realizing is the trouble of these: me, means, meaning, and what it means.

The trouble of me is partially solved by charitable self-knowledge. I am willing to accept what I know already and can be counted on as being friendly enough to accept more to discover more, not as a snooper, but as a companion; as a listener, not an eavesdropper; an observer, not a Peeping Tom; a lover, not a manipulator. The right kind of self-love must precede a sonnet sequence.

The trouble of means is the trouble of language. As great and complex as that is, it comes down to the care, the fussy and bold care, of choosing a word, the word that allows the insight, the mind's action, to have a voice, a figure which lets it become sweetly and surely so: concrete. But more, the trouble of means is the trouble of word after word, word upon word, the voice in its sound—then how many more the troubles are and how much more trouble I must take. This trouble of means is as simple as the OED and complex as the count of *fire*, the right saying of *again*. When it is passed, for a time, in one verse or in twenty, it becomes another trouble, the trouble of meaning.

The trouble of meaning: what I find I have said is other—better or worse—than what I thought I had to say. For the meaning of the poem is in seeing how I have worked in taking the kind of trouble I took to find the meaning I find. So the final trouble of realizing, what it means, is the dust I must taste when I listen to what my poem means, good or bad. I keep thinking what it meant. The trouble of realizing ends in the trouble of making real my selflessness in the words written, accepting the repeal of myself from the conviction of my mind.

The trouble of disposing can be a rewarding trouble. If I think long enough about what I am going to do with this one particular poem, and this one, and this, I may be rewarded in knowing finally what I am supposed to do with poetry, surpassing simply the urge to publish, to put in print, to make available. The poem does not belong in a desk drawer, necessarily, nor does it necessarily belong in print, and it can be in both at once. Disposing the poem means a certain, an other, kind of selflessness: the guardian is the protector of his charge; the sire is the guardian of his offspring. But the real disposition of a poem is not to place it in this magazine or with that house. The parent does not teach his child manners for going into bungalow A and manners for entering mansion B. The real disposing of a poem is in its being, in knowing it is sound and can appear anywhere, not caring if it appear anywhere. When this kind of detachment seemed rash to me, it did so because I had not reflected long enough on what we are supposed to do with poetry. The recognition of a poem's being disposable, this is my disposing; the poem's disposition is in its self, not in its being published. That its disposition should have a page number or a press, ultimately, ought only to be the recognition of what I mean by disposing and the nature of my own disposition.

The trouble of enjoying and the trouble of understanding go especially together—although all these troubles go together—because these two troubles come together; they are simultaneous. I have to understand to enjoy and I have to enjoy to understand. I must nourish that state of mind which can take in and entertain the making in my own poem, its self, capable of stirring pleasure in me. I am my own reader, at first; unless this poem pleases me, it can not please him, my neighbor on whose fence I saw an oriole in mid-December. Even before this, I have to take the trouble to understand the enjoyment I must have in taking troubles, the pleasure I must learn in working hard, in sweating, that the greater enjoyment, the more leisurely one, may be had. And finally, but at the same time, I must take the trouble of enjoying so that I can understand how my neighbor will find pleasure in understanding, will understand through the pleasure, the disposition of the poem, what it means, its meaning, its means, the me of him in it, its conclusion in its beginning: in mid-December the oriole on our fence; in the winter of the world, the song of the sun.

Afterthought

• Geoffrey Johnson

I had not thought how perilous it was
To win this isolation for our love,
To soar in union from a peak so proud
And let the world and all its prizes—power,
Substance, repute, supports of friends and kin
Sail far below us like dismembered cloud.

I had not thought; but now intensified
By length of absence from my heart, a fear
Darkens the day; the more, so lone, we mean
To one another from this height, the more
The sense of blinding emptiness could strike
The one left widowed with the what has been.

And yet our eagle-mated spirits must,
To tread the highroads of the sun, ignore
What the world's wisdom, gray with fact, affirms
Are best insurances against the bolts
Of Time and Death. Nor when that blow dissevers
Shall the one left descend to making terms.

Sign of Contradiction

• Frank J. Lawrence

Abbot Edmund Katz, O.S.S.P.B., Order of Saints Paul and Benedict, sat upon a faldstool in the middle of the chapter room of St. Paul's Abbey. His community on mahogany benches, their backs against the yellow brick wall, formed a black gabardine semicircle around him.

Edmund had put on a white cope and miter and taken his crozier uneasily. He was tired and tried to stretch himself by arching his back. He searched the faces of his monks, ivory masks resting on heaps of black cloth. They were fathomless. Each seemed to be deliberately avoiding his gaze. Instead, they eyed the Archbishop, who was addressing them.

The Archbishop, seated in a needle-point armchair on a dais, nodded in deference to the Abbot and cleared his throat.

Edmund acknowledged the nod automatically, solemnly. He felt a sweat bead in the palm of his hand holding the crozier. He squeezed, but the bead escaped and rolled down the long silver bar. He wondered if any of his monks had been observing him and felt confused, but knew that something important was going to happen.

The Archbishop grunted and said to the assembly, "Ah—er—we have received a letter of request from a member of this community to investigate the advisability—ah—er—of electing a coadjutor to assist your good superior, a coadjutor abbot."

Edmund, slightly bewildered, mused on the proposal. An admini-

strator? Had he failed to that extent? As he pondered, he observed each monk take a white marble and a black one and walk to the end of the chapter room, where he placed one of the marbles in a box. The Abbot tried to guess what color each had dropped into the box. He thought that marbles were a trifle worldly—no, childish. He recalled what an expert with marbles he had been as a boy, how proud he would be when he knocked the marble of his companions out of the ring. Ping! Ping! Ping! He had knocked them all out.

His mind returned to the chapter room and the reason for the letter and the voting: they were trying to determine if he were senile. He went off again to another time of voting when he was elected the first abbot of St. Paul's. The marbles didn't seem childish then. He thought at the time that he had no chance, but then he was tied with Sylvester, a man ten years his senior, and the next voting decided in his favor.

At first he was shocked: what could he do as Abbot? He realized how ridiculous it seemed: men many years his senior would kneel to him and kiss his hand and swear their obedience. He recalled feeling a certain elation, a sudden joy of spirit when as a boy he shot the marbles from the ring. He found himself suddenly thinking of sweeping reforms, producing a new, modern aggregation. He would be an example to all his monks. He thought, too, of temptation to vanity, and knew many such

temptations would assault him.

Upon his election, he chose as motto *Memento homo quia pulvis es*, Remember man that thou art dust. He had felt the satisfaction a farmer might feel when he sets a scarecrow in his fields to chase the crows.

The Abbot became aware of his community again, and the marbles were still dropping into the box. He looked at his vestments, at the enameled pectoral cross, gift from the Abbot of Montserrat in Spain. That gift caused him to order all his pontifical regalia from Montserrat for his solemn installation. He remembered receiving the crozier, miter, ring and relived again the horror of that day. He had entered the abbey church dressed as a humble monk, black wool hood drawn over his head, hands beneath his scapular. When the episcopal ring was pushed on his finger, his heart thumped as he became wedded to the community for life. Horror came when, fully vested, he waited for the Archbishop to place the miter on his head. Then his spine chilled, as though the huge head-piece had sent frigid air down his back. He shuddered. A feeling of pleasure, almost sensual in its intensity, came over him. His sense of touch magnified beneath his inner garments and seemed to imbue the outer vestments. His skin beat against the wool of his habit, searching for a chink through which to fondle the soft silk.

He wanted to withdraw his skin completely from the outer garb, and he drew in his stomach and chest, but the garments merely settled easily over their accustomed terrain. He felt stifled and wished to tear off the robes, but he could not, nor could he remember his motto. He was caught. He feared the terrible pleas-

ure, the sensual feeling of delight in his position and power, and immediately began to wonder why he had been elected. Then he knew what he would do: everything he would do would be for the glory of the Church and God, and not for himself. He would have to recall his motto daily, even hourly, and would have it before him, inscribed even on his crozier. He would have it there to remind him.

The Abbot's recollections fled from him as swiftly as they had come, and yet he wanted to think on these things a little more; he didn't feel satisfied with them. He would like to see his friend, Gregory, the first professed monk he had received after his election. What he wished to tell Gregory he wasn't sure, but he knew he had to see him. Gregory was like a son to him. What would he tell his son? About a serpent? A contradiction? A strange temptation?

He was brought back by the sound of the marbles coming from the box. The Archbishop was separating the white from the black, and when he was finished, he cleared his throat. "Ah—er—since the white predominate," he said, "there will be an election for a coadjutor abbot in this room at two-thirty tomorrow afternoon." He nodded to the Abbot and waited.

Edmund wondered what the Archbishop wanted. He wondered also if Gregory would arrive before the election. One thing, however, caused him no wonder: his decision that there would be no coadjutor. He would find the one who wrote the letter; Gregory would help him there.

* * *

Swoosh! The Abbot aimed again, swinging his scapular like a fly swatter, forgetting about his breakfast

and his guest, Gregory. The lone fly kept buzzing him, and he abhorred flies: they reminded him of decay and death. "This place is filled with flies, Father Prior! Can't you do something about them?"

He made another swooping attack, this time toward where the Prior sat. The latter dropped his large spoon into his bowl and pushed it from him. Again and again the Abbot swatted, and the Prior kept pushing from the table. One last desperate swoop did nothing but unsettle the Abbot's skullcap. He leaned back in his chair exhausted, the cap atilt like a beret over one ear, his stomach heaving, the pectoral cross moving up and down with his breathing. The Prior thought it best and proper to depart.

The Abbot scowled at his departure and then at the staring monks. Again the clatter of tableware started in the refectory, and he surveyed his community to assure himself that no snickering took place at the tables lining the walls. "Old women," he muttered; no one heard but Gregory. The Abbot was certain the monks were gloating over their victory of the day before; they were going to elect a coadjutor. Then he remembered the letter to the Archbishop and clenched his fist. He would find a way of stopping the monks. He looked at Gregory; it was a good thing he had come when ordered, for the Abbot didn't wish to see another abbot in the place. He would rather die. Die? He hated the word—it reminded him of the tomb, and that reminded him he would have to settle that problem shortly. Yet his health wasn't too bad; blood pressure a little high, heart fair, lungs—A man in his position could last long, longer than some of these youngbloods might like. He chuckled.

A person in his position was strong, and he would hold that station. An abbot was almost a bishop, and everyone knew they live long lives.

Edmund felt better—for the moment. When he stretched, he almost jabbed his fist into Gregory's face. He took a glass of tomato juice and, pressing one palm over his skullcap, raised the glass to his lips, tilted his head, and drank. He set the glass down hard and smacked his lips. "Table reader's got an annoying voice," he quietly told himself. A passage from the Holy Rule of the Order was being read, a section that dwelt upon the duties of an abbot:

Let him ever keep his own frailty before his eyes and remember that the bruised reed (offending monk) must not be broken.

"Stop, Frater," the Abbot said. That was not a part of the Rule. Another trick to point out his senility before the election. His monks were about to be rid of him, and now they were seeking to rationalize their actions. "Medieval mush!" he muttered and noticed that the monks were eyeing him. "Mush—bring Father Gregory some mush," he called to a novice. He couldn't remember the novice's name, nor his face. *I have lost track of them*, he reflected.

"No thank you," Gregory said to the novice who was waiting on him.

"Give him some mush," the Abbot said, insisting. Gregory, giving in to Edmund's humor, took the mush.

The Abbot leaned back in his heavy throne-chair, which rumbled backward thundering against the wall: a signal for the monk nearest the door to open it and stand sentry until the Abbot passed.

The Abbot groped for the gold-knobbed cane—one befitting a Church prelate. He rocked forward and backward in the chair until he gained momentum to thrust himself forward and out of it. Leaning against the table, he thought, Rheumatism: three-score years and ten. After that pain and suffering. His face muscles tightened; he strained to make the single step from his table dais. He thought he saw the pectoral cross heave outward each time his heart beat. The cross was uncomfortable over his heart. The Abbot lifted the cross in the palm of his hand.

All the way from Montserrat that cross had come; its enamel work—flawless: a serpent twisted around a tree—the coat of arms. The serpent offered fruit to a ringed hand—an episcopal ring it seemed. Edmund read his motto on the cross. “Remember that you are dust,” he half questioned, half stated. “Dust—but to think it’s all for the glory of the Church.”

The Abbot flipped over the cross and examined its jeweled back. The gems had come uncut from Mexico; now they were lovely. He recalled preaching a sermon using the figure of an uncut gem: ah—but it escaped him. He wanted to use all the stones before he died—or before that coadjutor. But hadn’t he decided that there should be no assistant? Not while he could still shout the others down. Couldn’t tell but that the next one wouldn’t see any use for gems.

The Abbot’s neck stiffened. Jewels! He felt that tremor of sensual enjoyment. He looked at the front again: a snake in a tree. He saw Gregory fiddling with his mush. He and Gregory would find out who wrote that letter—a snake, jewels? A contradiction?

Glory for the abbey. Jewels on the tomb.

“My dust,” he muttered.

Silence.

The Abbot hadn’t moved. The door stood open. He chided his wanderings and searched for an excuse. “Dust! Floor’s full of dust,” he pointed out. He hobbled toward the door.

The walk to the door conjured memories of his childhood when he hiked along the railroad tracks outside of St. Joseph, Missouri, toward a horizon that never came nearer. He thought the walk to the door seemed like that horizon: always so far away. But he mustered his best pontifical gait. How wonderfully he had walked, often trying to keep in step with the swelling rhythm of the processional. But he never liked to rush up the aisle, for he relished the pleasure. He imagined now that the cane was his silver bejeweled crozier, with the small piece of ivory cut like an elephant’s tusk for a crook. The thrill of pontificating! He imagined he was proceeding through the abbey church scattering his blessings right and left. Father Hilary was sounding the *Ecce Sacerdos Magnus*. This would be Easter Sunday. Edmund wore the white—no, the gold vestments and the new white buckskins. No—those buckskins pinched at the instep. Ah, but the pontifical gloves that the Holy Father had given to him—well, not exactly, but he would have if Edmund had gotten close enough to him at the audience. He had bought the gloves and sent them in to be blessed with the rosaries of the faithful.

“Father Abbot?” Someone had interrupted the procession—the refectory! The Abbot caught himself still distributing blessings. Clenching his fist, he barked, “Place is filled with

flies!" He slurred his blessing as if he were swatting.

Gregory tried to take the Abbot's elbow at the door, but he stiffened. "Keep your hands under your scapular, Gregory. Now we're going out to the cemetery." He fingered his cross to steady his nerves. He looked at the snake and the *memento mori* engraved under it. Glancing at Gregory, he flipped the cross, and it bounced against his stomach. "Not yet," the Abbot said, as the door slammed shut behind him.

* * *

The cemetery was wild with thistles and skunk cabbage. It had not progressed as the Abbot wished. A few bales of salt hay lying about half hidden in the weeds made one recall that not more than a year and a half before, steers had grazed in what was now the field of the dead. The semblance of order came from the small brown stone chapel and a fifteen foot marble cross in front of the entrance. Weeds obscured the base of the cross. Swarms of mosquitoes puffed in the air, like clouds of smoke from brush fires, creating the impression that perhaps purgatory wasn't too far away.

An old Cadillac coupé, its once dark blue paint looking like rubbed pastel chalk, whirled through the weeds and stopped in front of the cross. Gregory helped the Abbot struggle out of the front seat.

"You heard of this conspiracy to elect a coadjutor, Gregory?"

"I'm sure your abbatial dignity will be respected, Father."

"Wouldn't even be in question except for some letter—Gregory, I want your help; we've got to find out who wrote it."

The two of them walked into the chapel. At least this was completed.

What an idea he had had. Not only would they use the chapel on All Souls Day; it would also be a tomb for him. Glory even in death for the Church and God.

The Abbot craned his neck to inspect the vaulted ceiling. Light from the stained-glass windows created a three dimensional effect in the altar marble. The purple veins in the altar slab seemed to throb like the veins in Edmund's forehead. The marble floor sparkled, producing a thud when the Abbot struck it with his cane.

"Where's Father Sylvester buried, Father?" Gregory asked.

"Outside somewhere—we'll have to mark the grave when it's found, but with all the weeds—"

The Abbot dreamed other dreams than Sylvester. The altar was perfect, magnificent. He would be carried here with proper solemnity and placed under the altar—even a glass front might be provided. What glory he would give the Church even in death. He was *almost* a bishop. The jewels would be set in the altar front; the front slab removed, for its veins seemed to form the shape of a writhing serpent. Perhaps his monks might have a silver death mask made for him, like the Popes had, so that all could see how the first Abbot looked. He would tell Gregory about this . . . Turquoises could be set into the mask for eyes. There was something else he had to tell Gregory besides.

"You look tired, Father. Do you wish—"

"I wish you to be quiet." He thought he shouldn't have been so harsh with Gregory. He could see himself lying in a coffin. He would demand that his lovely crozier be placed in his left hand; his right hand in blessing, a Byzantine one like the Pope uses. He had friends:

cardinals, bishops—he was almost a bishop—would kneel and pray for him and see how his monks had loved him.

“It’s eleven o’clock, Father. Should you retire?” Gregory interrupted him.

Had he been here that long? The Abbot nodded. He wondered which way he would lie—probably his head to the gospel side. He fingered his cross. Why had he chosen that coat of arms? There was something to tell Gregory about a serpent in a tree.

He smiled suddenly, patted his stomach, and shuffled towards the altar. “Marvelous! A marvelous idea,” he exclaimed, reaching and stretching his hands over the altar top; then he seized it as if to tear it from the floor. He wondered whether, for his present thought, he might be struck dead like—like whoever it was in the Old Testament who was struck dead for daring to touch the Ark of the Covenant?

“Why not?” he said aloud. In forty or fifty years, none of these monks would be alive. Only the good deeds remain. Memory is short. Someone might decide to—No, that would be presumption. He turned. Gregory was reciting his breviary by the light from the window beside the altar.

“Gregory—”

“Yes, Father?”

“Do you think it’s hard to be saved?”

“I guess—”

“Do you think it’s hard to be a saint?”

“If you’re saved, then you are a saint.”

“I mean a *canonized* saint.”

“Men are made of dust, Father. It’s awfully hard to shake the dust off their feet.”

The Abbot made an impatient ges-

ture, and Gregory returned to his breviary. He was sure that Gregory hadn’t known what he had been driving at. Why, in fifty years, who would be left to dispute a claim?

He had been playing with his cross. Remember that thou art dust, he translated silently. His eyebrows knit. Gregory had just said something about dust. He flipped the cross and let it thud against his stomach once, twice. There was a sharp pain at the third bounce. He stood still. He dared not move; he waited like one who listens to hear if a clock will strike thirteen—sharper pain. He wouldn’t move his head, but, with his eyes, he sought out Gregory, who was still reading. The sound of Gregory’s lips smacking together and the thumping of his own heart were the only noises that he heard. He was certain that Gregory would hear the heart beating too; then he would come.

When Gregory did stir, it was the Abbot’s cane clattering to the marble floor that aroused him.

* * *

Abbot Edmund opened both eyes. One lid kept fluttering. He heard some of his monks reciting the *De Profundis*—The Office of the Dead, he thought. He found that he could work his right hand. He was back in his own room, but he couldn’t feel the bed beneath him. He wasn’t dead, but he had to remind himself of the fact. If he might only speak with Gregory. He had to tell him about the tomb.

He shut his eyes a moment, and for a second, he thought he had died: he saw Father Sylvester. He had meant to mark Sylvester’s grave.

He opened his eyes and made a gagging sound. Gregory’s face appeared above him. Gregory removed

the cross from the Abbot's neck and held it up before him.

He tried to recall what he had told Gregory about the tomb, about the jewels, the coffin. Had he said anything at all? He couldn't remember. All he could recall was Sylvester's grave hidden by weeds. Then came flooding into his mind, the grand processions, the glorious vestments.

He saw a movement in front of him; he saw Gregory with the cross. With deliberate strength, he said, "The letter—I wrote it myself." I wrote it to the Archbishop, he thought to himself. He smiled. He wasn't so senile after all. He had provided for a successor.

"Gregory!" he called.

The tide, his thoughts, came rushing, bursting back into his mind. Each one he must tell Gregory. But he felt so weak. Which thought should he tell?

"What time?" he asked.

"Four o'clock in the afternoon, Father. You slept through the election."

The thoughts were pounding into his brain, like the surf crashing on the beach. He was grasping at these thoughts, like a child who tries to seize the wave on the beach before it is swamped by the next rush. He was waiting to seize *the* thought.

He opened his eyes and stared at Gregory. He knew what he must speak

soon. He felt like an actor who must recite his closing lines as the curtain descends, an actor whose timing is bad and who must squeeze in his speech while trying to hold up the final curtain. His eyelids were so heavy. In a moment he heard himself saying something that he didn't comprehend at first.

"The snake—" Then he knew. "Watch!"

Gregory, using his index finger, closed the Abbot's eyes.

"Please leave me alone here," Gregory whispered to the monks in the room.

"Yes, Father Abbot," Father Steven responded and kissed Gregory's hand.

While the community filed into the corridor, Gregory pried the pectoral cross from Edmund's hand and stared at the coat of arms. A musty breeze blew in from the corridor. Gregory lifted the cross chain and placed it on himself. He examined the jewels on the back. Suddenly, he snatched the cross from his neck and raised it as if he were about to dash it upon the floor. Then Gregory slowly placed the cross in Edmund's hands, blessed the body, and disappeared from the room.

The room was dark except for the candles which had been placed at Edmund's head and feet. Through the window, a cold slicing sound could be heard, as when a shovel is plunged into the earth.



Contributors

MONROE C. BEARDSLEY, professor of philosophy at Swarthmore College, had an essay "Aesthetic Enjoyment: a Human Good" in the November 1961 issue of **four quarters**. SAMUEL HYNES has written several articles for this magazine and had a story, "A Few Words about Dying," in the first number of the present volume. W. ARTHUR BOGGS, poet and teacher, writes from Portland State College, Oregon: "The thought behind the poem ("Fit the Teller to the Tale?") has long been one of my firm convictions." Professor Boggs is a frequent contributor to the poetry columns of newspapers and magazines. JOHN FANDEL, poet and member of the Department of English at Manhattan College, conducted a class in the writing of poetry at La Salle College's writers' conference in the fall of 1962, at which he read the article that appears here. GEOFFREY JOHNSON, a frequent contributor to British and American magazines, lives in Dorset, England. ANDREW J. FAIR, JR., a senior at La Salle College, will receive his degree in English studies, June 1964. FRANK J. LAWRENCE, a student majoring in English, is on leave of absence from the College. JOHN KEENAN is a member of the English department of La Salle as is also CLAUDE F. KOCH, whose short story "A Gift for Poseidon" appears in the *Sewanee Review*, Winter 1964.

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